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in a sentence which contains a quaint mistake: "No less arresting is his account of the Behistun carvings, and of his bold climb up the rock face to study the tablets. He is the only European who has stood upon these perilous ledges since Sir Henry Rawlinson made his famous ascent." I am credibly informed that this European was born in New York.

The traveller's route took him still to the southward, through Ispahan, to the tomb of Cyrus and the ruins of Persepolis, in the mountains that rise up in terraces from the Persian Gulf. There was an expedition to Shiraz, the shrine of Persian poetry; another to Yezd, where the Zoroastrian faith still dwells in Iran; and then the traveller turned his face toward Teheran and the north. We finally take leave of him on the southern shore of the Caspian, under the shadow of the vast snowy cone of Damavand.

So with wisdom and charm we are carried through the ages, and made to behold again one of the sacred lands. Its whole life grows before the inner eyes, as the magic scroll is unrolled through century after century, and we realize that our author has written an exceptional book, with exceptional excellence.

CHARLES JOHNSTON.

"ALICE-FOR-SHORT." *

It will be possible for a great many of Mr. de Morgan's agreeably stimulated readers to read one or both of his excellent novels without discovering their most astonishing characteristic: the really frivolous lightness, that is to say, with which this whimsical artist has regarded life. Such an anxious age is ours that the dullest hack-writer has not failed to gather from his masters an aching sense of the tragic seriousness of things. Survivor of a more unconcerned era, smilingly unaware of his own frivolity, the author of "Alice-for-Short" and of "Joseph Vance" remains alone, at his safe and polite distance, a leisurely and accomplished observer of manners—of certain kinds of manners. It is safe to say that it has never occurred to him to devote dark nights to grim-intentioned studies of humankind, or feverish dawns to the record of his discoveries. He is, rather, of the unconscious artists; of

* "Alice-for-Short." By William de Morgan. New York: Henry Holt & Co.

those whose tolerant passivity feeds a desultory artistic sense with miscellaneous impressions, merely. Crime and disaster and disease have not appalled him, but these are comfortably regarded as tools of the trade, as furtherers of Plot. Mr. de Morgan's reliable and unterrifying ghosts, like his favorite characters' narrow escapes from death, leave the reader's nervous system as free from shock as the author's obviously is. When he is not exercising his distinguishing genius for extracting humor from what he would himself perhaps call the Unpleasant, he is obscuring it by a decent, impenetrable gloss. The most sensitive and lady-like reader can candidly say at the end that she has been reading a "pretty story."

Certainly it is neither for the intimate realities of his picture, for it is devoid of them, nor for his romance, which is extraordinarily tame—Mr. de Morgan remains an inveterate sentimentalist—that we all, ingenuous and fault-finding alike, find so much enjoyment in "Alice-for-Short." And the enjoyment is legitimate, it requires no apology. A delicate sense of words and a confident and unstinted fashion of using them are not common gifts; nor is the art of commenting, with unforced, unfailing humor, on the little, usual things of life. We may have no interest whatever in the entirely incidental Partridge, the housekeeper, but we delight in learning that she

"waded through her prose epic—which she prolongs as much as possible from the feeling (shared by almost all of us, perhaps) that any circumstantial narrative of events apologizes for the share we have had in them." A similar joy is derived from Mrs. Twills, "whose attitude, so far as it could be understood, seemed to be that of premature resentment against assumed allegations of interference on her part. . . . She left an impression of having censured the human race for a vice of interposition that she was nobly exempt from. She can hardly be said to have spoken on the subject. She withdrew after producing an effect of having done so, and went up-stairs with a pail."

In short, Mr. de Morgan is irresistible when he is playful; but his playfulness has no connection whatever with the not too singular and absorbing fortunes of that very pleasant young woman, Alicia Kavanagh—Alice-for-Short. Just as in "Joseph Vance," it is the delicious irregularities and irrelevancies that cajole the reader and reconcile him to much that is tedious and much that is trivial and, in this case, to a strangely cumbrous plot. If the average novel-reader had not developed a strong, self-protective

instinct, if he did not know when alertly to dodge and skip, and when weakly to lay his head on his pillow, he would faint with exhaustion before he had followed this intricate and far-spreading story to its multiple ends; an ungrateful confession when an author has been at such elaborate pains to allure and mystify.

It would be a fantastic and unnecessary exercise to compare two books of such essential similarity as "Alice-for-Short" and "Joseph Vance." Its author's talent appears not to be variable or versatile; it is like that of a good conversationalist, whose stories never fail of applause partly for the very reason that they are so much alike. There is no occasion for taking the novelist's agreeable characters more seriously than he has himself, or for subjecting them to any shattering analysis. If his characters ever undergo the exhausting emotions and states of mind that plenty of other writers describe for us, this novelist has considered suppression the part of good taste and the reader can only acquiesce. Of such a burden as an abstract theme both novels are of course entirely innocent. Alice, like Joseph, is rescued from squalor and brought up in an irreproachable family. But while it is perfectly plain from the start that she is to marry her rescuer, it is the weakness of Mr. de Morgan's method that this happy climax, the single climax of the story, appears to be deferred for a great many pages indeed. It is not his artless and hesitating lovers, but his unconventional characters, his Mr. Jerrythoughts and Mrs. Kavanaghs, of whom the author, in spite of his conventional predilections, displays the most adroit and satisfactory grasp. Nothing could be more admirable than the first few chapters of this story, leading up to the tragedy that disposes of the unworthy Kavanagh parents. But Mr. de Morgan has the audacity to treat the tragedy as comedy, and it is masterly in every word. If the rest of the book were as good, "Alice-for-Short" would be a permanent work of genius, just as "Joseph Vance" would have been a masterpiece if Christopher Vance could have been made the hero. One would delight to quote pages from both books, pages that merely celebrate the idiosyncrasies of drunken and disreputable persons whose lives scarcely affect the entirely respectable narrative. It was said of Mrs. Kavanagh, for instance, that there were

"special opportunities that she cherished of affirming her normal self-restraint by a parade of their exceptional character. Breakfast, dinner and supper yielded the luxury of a clear conscience, coupled with the

public exhibition of the rum-bottle; and as she sat watching her husband correcting the shortcomings of Alice's piece of bread-and-butter, her mind was gradually approaching a bottle of rum in the corner cupboard, whose door stood suggestively on the jar, almost within reach of her hand.

"To broach a topic of this sort, you affect faintness, smile in a sickly way, and sigh as one accustomed to conceal suffering. By doing so, you provoke inquiry, and procure a fulcrum. In response to her husband's 'Why don't you take your supper?' Goody Peppermint, who had done all these things with a view to this question, replied, 'No airpetite!' She emphasized this by laying her hand across the outside of her interior, on which her husband began a groan, and cut it off short in the middle."

This reliance upon drunkenness to furnish his comic material is among Mr. de Morgan's heritages from a lighter-minded epoch; but for his curious moral fastidiousness there must be some other origin. To any form of weakness he stoops with indulgent grace; but characters of deliberately malign intent—such as persons experienced in the business of story-writing declare it is occasionally necessary to introduce—he feels constrained to handle with his longest rhetorical tongs. He even isolates them, so far as possible, lest the other characters suffer contagion, and when they have performed the evil assigned them he gets them out of the story and into their graves with all possible despatch. That deceitful and immoral person, Lavinia Straker, is continually tagged by the author's whimsical apologies for introducing her at all. She is not allowed in the same drawing-room, so to speak, with the excellent group who represent safe moral standards; and a knowledge of her peccadilloes is decently imparted at second hand. This may not be the method of great literature; but it is undoubtedly Mr. de Morgan's privilege to be as moral as he pleases.

After all, the truth about such a book as "Alice-for-Short" may be said in a sentence. It is in great qualities that it is deficient—and how often may great qualities be found? And it is in the lesser, but not negligible ones—in wise comment, deft workmanship, in humor, fancifulness and charm—that it is satisfyingly replete.

OLIVIA HOWARD DUNBAR.